

Abstract

Because of the distance in time and the lack of testifying documents, one should be extremely careful when labelling portraits in medieval books of hours as donor portraits or owner portraits. There are, however, manuscripts that reveal their first owner within their decorative programme, and the *Lamoignon Hours* (Lisbon, Gulbenkian, ms LA 237) is one of these. This article aims to discuss the iconography of the three portraits found on f.165v, f.202v and f.286v, as well as the relevance of portraiture and heraldic insignia in books of hours and the significance of such content to the original owner and to those who possessed the book afterwards. ●

Resumo

A distância no tempo e a ausência de documentação testemunhal obrigam a agir com cautela quando se pretende confirmar a representação dos donos ou dos doadores nos retratos dos Livros de Horas medievais. Existem, porém, alguns manuscritos que revelam no seu programa decorativo a identidade do seu primeiro proprietário, como acontece nas Horas de Lamoignon (Lisboa, Museu da Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, ms LA 237). O presente artigo explora a iconografia dos três retratos que aparecem em f.165v, f.202v e f.286v, e analisa a relevância do retrato e dos emblemas heráldicos nos Livros de Horas, bem como a importância deste tipo de conteúdo para o dono original e para os possuidores posteriores do livro. ●

key-words

FRENCH ART
FIFTEENTH CENTURY
ILLUMINATION
BOOKS OF HOURS
HERALDRY

palavras-chave

ARTE FRANCESA
SÉCULO XV
ILUMINURA
LIVRO DE HORAS
HERÁLDICA

OWNER PORTRAITS AND HERALDRY IN THE *LAMOIGNON HOURS*

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The *Lamoignon Hours* was illuminated by the Bedford Master and his assistants in Paris sometime around 1415. The manuscript is also known as the *Book of Hours of Isabelle of Brittany*, and it is now kept as ms LA 237 in the Gulbenkian Collection in Lisbon. The name Lamoignon comes from an 18th century owner. The manuscript is richly decorated, and it includes 32 full page miniatures. In style and iconography it is strongly connected to two other books of hours from the same master, namely the *Bedford Hours* (London, British Library, ms Add 18850) and the *Vienna Hours* (Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, ms 1855). Three of the full page miniatures can be classified as portraits, and there are three *folios* with coats of arms. The aim of this paper is to discuss the iconography of the portraits, the relevance of portraiture and heraldic insignia in books of hours, and the significance of such content to the original owner and to those who possessed the book afterwards. I have entitled this paper “Owner Portraits and Heraldry in the *Lamoignon Hours*”, well aware of the traps connected both to the word ‘owner’ and ‘portrait’ used in discussions on medieval manuscripts. For the *Lamoignon Hours*, however, it is possible to talk about the manuscript’s owner because the portraits are enriched with coats of arms. Still, I would not use the term ‘donor portrait’, as I follow an advice given by Madeline Caviness: “We would do well to refrain from using the standard term donor figure, let alone donor portrait, for owners until we are sure that they controlled the means of production” (Caviness 1996, 113). Only further research can tell who controlled the means of production when the *Lamoignon Hours* was



FIG.1 CELEBRATION OF THE MASS, BEDFORD MASTER, LAMOIGNON HOURS, LISBON, GULBENKIAN, MS LA 237, F. 165V

being commissioned. Portraits in illuminated manuscripts are often idealised portraits without a person's actual features. That said, Eberhard König has noted that the Bedford Master distinguished clearly between the concepts of an image of an owner in prayer and an actual portrait, taking the age and facial features of the persons depicted in the Master's *Grand Heures* of the Duc de Berry as the most prominent example (König 2007, 78).

The three portraits in the Lamoignon Hours appear on f. 165v, in front of text extracts from the Mass (fig. 1), on 202v, facing the Marian prayer 'O Intemerata' (fig. 2) – here we see the Bedford Master differing between a owner at prayer and an actual portrait –, and on 286v, facing the 'Athanasian Creed' (fig. 3). In the two latter, the portraits are accompanied by heraldry as well, embroidered on cloths covering the altars in front of the praying owner: the coat of arms of Brittany, i.e. Ermine, and Guy de Laval, i.e. Gold, five escallops Argent on a cross Gules between sixteen eaglets Azure on its antependium. The co-existence of the Brittany and Laval coat of arms and the lady at prayer has led art historians to believe that the book of



FIG.2 JEANNE OF FRANCE AT PRAYER – O INTEMERATA, BEDFORD MASTER, LAMOIGNON HOURS. LISBON, GULBENKIAN, MS LA 237, F. 202V

hours was made for Isabelle of Brittany (1411-1442), daughter of Jeanne of France and John IV of Brittany. She married Guy XIV, count of Laval in October 1430, and the book was for a long time thought of having been made as a present for that occasion. That is why the manuscript is referred to as the *Book of Hours of Isabelle of Brittany* in many publications.

There is a discrepancy, however, between the dress worn by the protagonist and the coat arms: the blue dress with ermine wore by the lady in the miniature suggest she is a member of the royal family – which Isabelle was not. And a close examination of the miniatures demonstrates that the coat of arms has been repainted, as François Avril noted in an entry on the manuscript written in 2004, suggesting the *Lamoignon Hours* was commissioned for Isabelle's mother, Jeanne of France (1391-1433), the only daughter of the French King Charles VI and Queen Isabeau of Bavaria to survive childhood (Avril 2004, 354). Avril is probably aware of, although it is not mentioned in this entry, that the coats of arms on the pall which is included in the miniature that is facing the Monday Hours of the Dead on f. 216v, is covered with the arms of

Brittany impaling those of France, i.e. the coat of arms of Jeanne of France (fig. 4). This miniature must be considered the key to the identification of the first owner of the manuscript, Jeanne of France, apart from being a very early example of a miniature where the owner's coats of arms are present on a pall.

The first portrait appears on f.165v (fig. 1), at the opening of text extracts from the Mass. These extracts are accompanied by pedagogical guidelines written in French, beginning 'Quant tu te coucheras tu diras se qui sensuit', i.e. the antiphon from Sunday Compline¹. The following text gives instructions for what to say when leaving home, passing by the cemetery, and what to say throughout the celebration of the Mass. The main scene is a *Celebration of the Mass*, set within a church: a priest, wearing a blue gown, reads from the Bible, while two clergymen, also in blue gowns, hold a candle and a torch, respectively. Four adjutants are singing, gathered around an open book placed on a stall. Eight persons populate the floor in front of the altar; Jeanne of France, wearing a red dress with ermine, folds her hands; three ladies in waiting, two are reading, seated, one is praying; four men, dressed in cloths for the nobility, three of them fold their hands, the last one carry an open book in his hands. The latter might be Jeanne's husband, the others the husband's attendants. In the surrounding roundels, the same princess is depicted in her daily routines: being dressed by her attendants, going to church, at confession, at her private devotions, when receiving communion, and when retiring.

Portraits in manuscripts are most frequently found at the *Matins* of the *Hours of the Virgin*, or prefacing the 'Obsecro te' or the 'O Intemerata'. The donor or the owner, then, is seen at prayer in front of or next to an *Annunciation* (Matins), a *Virgin and Child* ('Obsecro te') or a *Pietà* ('O Intemerata'). The *Lamoignon Hours* has a portrait prefacing the 'O Intemerata' on f.202v (Fig. 2). Jeanne of France is shown at prayer, standing in front of an altar, upon which there is an open book. She is dressed in a blue dress with a white collar, and her hair is nicely ornamented with flowers. She is accompanied by two reading women; one is dressed in a green dress and with the hair ornamented like Jeanne – a daughter? – The other wears a pink dress of a more modest look and her hair is covered by a white headgear – a lady in waiting? The surrounding architecture is that of a church or a (private) chapel, limited by an arcade and a drapery to the left of the women, and an ambulatorium to the right.

There are five border medallions spread among the flower garlands and birds in the margins, all of them with scenes from story XVIII of the *Miracles de Notre Dame*, written by Jean le Conte at the end of the XIV century, entitled *De l'enfant juif que son pere mist en une fornaiise, que la Virge Marie sauva*². In the medallion in the upper right corner of the folio, three children are kneeling around a communion table inside a church, and a priest is about to celebrate the communion with them. In the medallion below, a Jewish (indicated as such because of his headgear) man – the father – puts one of the children from the scene above – the one dressed in red – in an oven. To the left in the *bas-de-page*, in the third medallion, three adults save the child from the fire. To the right, the father is being caught by the Christians, and in the upper left corner of the page, in the last medallion, the Jewish father is put inside the oven.

1. Salva nos Domine vigilantes, custodi nos dormientes ut vigilemus cum Christo, et requiescamus in pace.

2. Cf. <http://www.ottawa.ca/academic/arts/lfa/activites/textes/leconte/lec20htm.htm> (accessed 23.01.2007). The text is preserved in ms Français 1806, Bibliothèque nationale, Paris.



FIG.3 JEANNE OF FRANCE AT PRAYER – *QUICUMQUE VULT*, BEDFORD MASTER, LAMOIGNON HOURS, LISBON, GULBENKIAN, MS LA 237, F. 286V

3. Be, at every hour and every moment of my life, inside and outside me, my steadfast guardians and pious intercessors before God.

The reading and possession of books, probably Books of Hours, among the three women on f. 202v testify to a wish among the nobility to be associated with a certain knowledge of the written word, and as such also with the word incarnate, the divine. Jeanne is the only one who gazes upwards, to a representation of the Virgin and Child, surrounded by St Paul and St Peter and other male saints on their right side and St Catherine and other female saints on their left, and can be understood as a visualization of the intercessors of the prayer(s) Jeanne is about to say. This owner portrait visualizes both the practice of devout prayer and its goal: direct communication with the divine (Smith 2006, 91).

The story of the Jewish boy, with its opposites between ‘good’ (the child, the Christians) and ‘bad’ (the Jewish father), surely opens up for anti-Jewish sentiments. Prefacing the Marian prayer ‘O Intemerata’ (O, Immaculate Virgin), a prayer that is addressing the Virgin – and St John the Evangelist – directly in especially urgent tones³, it could also be understood as a celebration of the Virgin’s omnipresence that so miraculously saved this child from being burned alive. As the story of the Jewish



FIG.4 OFFICE OF THE DEAD, BEDFORD MASTER, LAMOIGNON HOURS, LISBON, GULBENKIAN, MS LA 237, F. 286V

boy is, to the best of my knowledge, not included in any other book of hours, I allow me to compare the roundels with two altar frontals depicting the scene, namely the so called Årdal II-frontal (Oslo, Historisk Museum) and the frontal from Vallbona de los Monges (Barcelona, Museu nacional d'art de Catalunya). In the Årdal II-frontal, the story has been interpreted as a Marian miracle, and Mary saving the boy has been seen as a parallel to the way Christ is saving the souls in Limbo (Wickström 2000, 46). In the Spanish frontal, the story is interpreted as an expression of the anti-Jewish sentiments found in region around in the middle of the fourteenth century (Carbonell and Sureda 1997, 389-392). However the interpretation, the inclusion of the story together with an owner portrait is rather unique, since, as Roger Wieck has noted, "the main theme of the 'O Intemerata' is the faithfulness of the Virgin and John the Evangelist at the Crucifixion, a *Lamentation* often illustrates this prayer" (Wieck 2001, 498). Being a miracle invoking the Virgin Mary, it is strange that the Virgin herself is not represented in any of the roundels. Even more so since the story is included in a book of hours and that they are placed in front of a Marian prayer.

4. Cf. the line “Fides autem catholica haec est: ut Deum in Trinitate, et Trinitatem in unitate veneremur”.

5. For further discussions of images/ coats of arms revealing the identity of the patron, see Nash 1999, 73ff. and Sandgren 2002, 101-103.

The last full page miniature in the manuscript, is found on f.286v, in front of the *Athanasian Creed*, also known as *Quicumque vult*, one of the four authoritative creeds of the Catholic Church, recited at the office of Prime on Sundays (fig. 3). Two women are seen praying; Jeanne, dressed in a red dress with ermine, is kneeling on a *prie dieu* with an open book before an altar, directing her prayers to the Trinity, depicted above her. In this miniature, however, her hair is covered with a white veil, not arranged with flowers. To the left, a seated lady in waiting, dressed in green, is reading, to the right, a white dog. Female figures are representing the four Cardinal Virtues, Prudence, Temperance, Justice and Fortitude, and the Theological Virtues Hope, Charity and Faith, thus comprising a complete pantheon of the virtues essential for all aspects of secular and religious life. Depicting the owner of the manuscript praying to the Trinity is - as in the O Intemerata - a direct visual translation of the creed.⁴

Because Books of hours were private artefacts, made for silent or low speaking recitation of prayers in privacy, the existence of owner portraits might be surprising. The lack of public display made them somewhat redundant. On the other hand, having a prescribed content, the adding of owner portraits, coats of arms and certain iconographical programmes in books of hours seem to have been the best way to personalise them⁵. In her book *Art, Identity and Devotion in Fourteenth Century England. Three Women and their Books of Hours*, Kathryn A. Smith analysed three books of hours made for women discovering that

Through the inclusion of donor and owner portraits, and carefully chosen or edited narrative or devotional imagery, sacred history could be reconstituted to reflect the book owner's point of view. In their unique pictorial and textual programmes the three books give evidence of the capacity of the illustrated devotional book to personalize sacred time for its user, by integrating family history and notions of individual and familial identity into the Christian salvation history that unfolded on its pages (Smith 2003, 57-58).

Margaret Manion has also carried out research on books of hours and women. In her essay *Women, Art and Devotion, Three French Fourteenth Century Royal Prayer Books*, she found that the iconography of these three horae “indicate that the women for whom they were made were trained in a number of different kinds of prayer; and were expected to devote considerable time to its practice” (Manion 1998, 39). She linked the iconography to the three principles for a successful vocal prayer put forward by Durand de Champagne in his *Speculum dominarum*, written at the end of the XIII century, i.e. to pay attention to the words so that they are recited correctly, to pay attention to the sense of what one is saying, and to think on the object of one's prayer. The latter is simultaneously the easiest and the most meritorious of these principles, and present in the three horae in their “frequent depiction of the donors shown consistently attentive before the objects of their devotion” (Manion 1998, 40).

Although the research of Manion and Smith is carried out on 14th century books of hours, their findings are still valid for books of hours made a century later, as the *Lamoignon Hours*. The three portraits of Jeanne of France/ Isabelle of Brittany praying are not 'frequent' – there are manuscripts, like the *Savoy Hours* made in the 1330's for Blanche of Burgundy, which may have had as many as eighty owner portraits – but they are depicted 'consistently attentive before the objects of their devotion'. Besides, they are all accompanied by border programmes that are quite insisting in guiding the female reader to lead a righteous life: the faithful woman who submits herself to God throughout the day, a miracle of the best female model of them all, the Virgin Mary, and personifications of the seven cardinal virtues. Besides, in all the portraits, the princess is accompanied by a small dog, a Fido, symbol of faithfulness. Being portrayed without her husband, the coats of arms add a commemoration of the female owner's family all the same, since a coat of arms of a married woman always points outside the woman herself. Unless she was an heiress, the married medieval woman would not have any proper coat of arms, but quartering the ones from her father and her husband, e.g. the Duke John IV of Brittany and Count Guy XIV Laval.

We can only guess what happened to the manuscript when Isabelle died in 1444. Did she want it to pass to one of her own daughters? She had three: Yolande, Jeanne and Louise⁶. But then, why would not the new owner modify the coat of arms? If her oldest daughter Yolande was the one who inherited the book, the question can be answered by heraldry custom. Yolande is not recorded to have married, and as an unmarried woman she would normally bear *upon a lozenge* the paternal arms – or here, her maternal arms. But why were the coats of arms not altered again? Was the manuscript hidden for some time? Or forgotten? Or did it simply go out of fashion? Unfortunately, the manuscript itself does not give any answers or clues apart from Lamoignon's L on f.3.

It should be added as an important final note that the three portraits discussed here are not an extraordinary feature of the *Lamoignon Hours*. Similar pictures of women at prayer are frequently shown in books of hours. In the *oeuvre* of the Bedford Master, they appear both in the *Sobieski Hours* and the *Bedford Hours*, although not in the *Vienna Hours*. In the *Lamoignon Hours* they personalize the manuscript together with the adding of coat of arms and the curious inclusion of the miracle in Bourges. Documentary evidence of most medieval women's lives is scarce. This fact has led Kathryn Smith to observe that books of hours "do more than supplement and enrich the sparse information available of their [female] owners: they are the most tangible and substantial evidence of their owners' very existence" (Smith 2003, 11). Whoever the future owners of the manuscript were, they would, as we, practically never have any notion of neither Jeanne of France nor Isabelle of Brittany, where it not for the portraits in their book of hours, and for the fact that the coat of arms was only altered once. ●

6. The five children of Isabelle of Brittany and Guy of Laval: Yolande (1431-1487), Jeanne (1433-1498), François (1435-1500), Jean de Laval (1437-1476) and Louise (1441-1480).

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